

Humanity Needs To Declare Independence From Fossil Fuels



CJ

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The Declaration of Independence, the work of a five-person committee appointed by the Continental Congress, but with Thomas Jefferson as the most vocal figure of the values of the Enlightenment on this side of this Atlantic being the primary author and upon the insistence of none other than John Adams himself, is one of the most important documents in the history of democracy and of political progress.

Built around Locke's political epistemology, the Declaration of Independence signaled to the world that the old political order based on the divine right of kings and political absolutism in general was illegitimate and that, subsequently, people have the right to overthrow a regime that fails to protect the "self-evident" rights of every individual, which are "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness."

The Declaration of Independence, the official birth certificate of the American nation and the most progressive document of its time in support of popular sovereignty, was officially approved by the Congress on July 4, 1776, but eventually it would end up becoming an inspiration to future generations both in the United States and around the world. For example, the "Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions" issued by early feminists at the July 1848 Seneca Falls Convention was modelled after the Declaration of Independence. Ho Chi Ming's speech on September 2, 1945, proclaiming the Independent Democratic Republic of Vietnam, began with nearly an exact quote from the second paragraph of America's 1776 Declaration of Independence.

Today, the United States and the world at large need a new declaration of independence—a declaration of independence from fossil fuels.

The planet is on the verge of unmitigated disaster due to global warming. The

Industrial Revolution, which began in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, brought about a series of major transformations in energy usage- first from wood to coal and then to oil and gas. And, to be sure, for more than a century, from the 1870s to the 1970s, to be exact, the world experienced unprecedented economic growth, although the relationship between economic growth and fossil fuel energy consumption is not straightforwardly linear for both developed and emerging economies.

However, for several decades now, we have also known of the effects of fossil fuels on the environment and climate change. The burning of fossil fuels releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Carbon dioxide, methane and other greenhouse gasses trap heat in Earth's atmosphere, causing global warming. The Earth's average global temperature has risen by 1.4 degrees Fahrenheit, according to NASA's Godard Institute. Some regions of the world, however, have already seen average temperatures rise by more than 2 degrees Fahrenheit because temperatures increase at different speeds, with land areas warming faster than coastal areas.

Global temperatures matter. Rising global temperatures have major effects on numerous fronts, ranging from air quality and rising sea levels to the frequency of environmental events such as forest fires, hurricanes, heat waves, floods, droughts, and so on. The climate crisis also impacts on human rights and becomes a driver of migration. And last but not least, there are economic costs associated with the climate crisis as rising temperatures affect a wide range of industries, from agriculture to tourism. It's estimated that the economic damage caused by natural disasters for the most recent decade (2000-2009) was approximately \$3 trillion-more than \$1 trillion increase from the previous decade.

Make no mistake about it. The world's most authoritative voice on the climate crisis, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (ICPP), has been warning us for several years now that the world is at serious risk, and that time is running out to save the planet. Yet, very little has been done so far to address our climate crisis, although we know what needs to be done.

What needs to be done is to move the world economy to net-zero emissions and 100 clean energy. This requires, starting immediately, to implement a radical plan for the phasing out of fossil fuels and the concomitant implementation of a green global infrastructure development plan. In this massive undertaking, the public

sector needs to become the vanguard of the transition to clean and renewable energy, with the citizenry fully on its corner and against those greedy capitalists who continue to put profits ahead of people and the planet's future.

We have the technical know-how as well as the available economic resources to make the transition to a clean energy future. Details of this undertaking are spelled out, for instance, in the recent publication of [*Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet*](#) (Verso 2020) by Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin.

Moreover, the transition to a clean energy future does not mean the end of economic growth. On the contrary, a Global Green New Deal, as University of Massachusetts-Amherst economics professor Robert Pollin has sketched out in the aforementioned book, will generate millions of new and good-paying jobs in both the developed and the developing countries. The economic benefits of a green new deal are quite significant, while the costs of not doing a green new deal are catastrophic.

In sum, the time has come for the people of the United States—and indeed of citizens all over the beautiful blue planet—to announce a new Declaration of Independence: a declaration of independence from fossil fuels. This is our only chance to move towards a sustainable future, our only chance to avoid the highly likely probability of a return to barbarism due to the collapse of organized social order brought about by mitigating global warming.

Degrowth Policies Cannot Avert Climate Crisis. We Need A Green

New Deal



Robert Pollin

The Green New Deal is the boldest and most likely the most effective way to combat the climate emergency. According to its advocates, the Green New Deal will save the planet while boosting economic growth and generating in the process millions of new and well-paying jobs. However, a growing number of ecological economists contend that rescuing the environment necessitates “degrowth.”

To the extent that a sharp reduction in economic activity is a positive goal, “degrowth” requires overturning the current world order. But do we have the luxury to wait for a new world order while the catastrophic impacts of global warming are already upon us and getting worse with each passing decade?

World-renowned progressive economist *Robert Pollin*, distinguished professor of economics and co-director of the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, is one of the leading proponents of a global Green New Deal. In this interview, he addresses the degrowth vs. Green New Deal debate, looking at how economies can grow while still advancing a viable climate stabilization project as long as the growth process is absolutely decoupled from fossil fuel consumption.

C.J. Polychroniou: Since the idea of a Green New Deal entered into public consciousness, the debate about climate emergency is becoming increasingly polarized between those advocating “green growth” and those arguing in support of “degrowth.” What exactly does “degrowth” mean, and is this at the end of the day an economic or an ideological debate?

Robert Pollin: Let me first say that I don't think that the debate on the climate emergency between advocates of degrowth versus the Green New Deal is becoming increasingly polarized, certainly not as a broad generalization. Rather, as an advocate of the Green New Deal and critic of degrowth, I would still say that there are large areas of agreement along with some significant differences. For example, I agree that uncontrolled economic growth produces serious environmental damage along with increases in the supply of goods and services that households, businesses and governments consume. I also agree that a significant share of what is produced and consumed in the current global capitalist economy is wasteful, especially much, if not most, of what high-income people throughout the world consume. It is also obvious that growth per se as an economic category makes no reference to the distribution of the costs and benefits of an expanding economy. I think it is good to keep in mind both the areas of agreement as well as the differences.

But what about definitions: What do we actually mean by the Green New Deal and degrowth?

Starting with the Green New Deal: The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that for the global economy to move onto a viable climate stabilization path, global emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) will have to fall by about 45 percent as of 2030 and reach net zero emissions by 2050. As such, by my definition, the core of the global Green New Deal is to advance a global project to hit these IPCC targets, and to accomplish this in a way that also expands decent job opportunities and raises mass living standards for working people and the poor throughout the world. The single most important project within the Green New Deal entails phasing out the consumption of oil, coal and natural gas to produce energy, since burning fossil fuels is responsible for about 70 - 75 percent of all global CO₂ emissions. We then have to build an entirely new global energy infrastructure, the centerpieces of which are high efficiency and clean renewable energy sources — primarily solar and wind power. The investments required to dramatically increase energy efficiency standards and to equally dramatically expand the global supply of clean energy sources will also be a huge source of new job creation, in all regions of the world. These are the basics of the Green New Deal as I see it. It is that simple in concept, while also providing specific pathways for achieving its overarching goals.

Now on degrowth: Since I am not a supporter, it would be unfair for me to be the

one explaining what it means. So here is how some of the leading degrowth proponents themselves describe the concept and movement. For example, in a 2015 edited volume titled, [*Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era*](#), the volume's editors Giacomo D'Alisa, Federico Demaria and Giorgos Kallis write that, "The foundational theses of degrowth are that growth is uneconomic and unjust, that it is ecologically unsustainable and that it will never be enough." More recently, a 2021 paper by Riccardo Mastini, Giorgos Kallis and Jason Hickel, titled, "[*A Green New Deal without Growth?*](#)," write that "ecological economists have defined degrowth as an equitable downscaling of throughput, with a concomitant securing of wellbeing."

It is instructive here that, in this 2021 paper, Mastini, Kallis and Hickel do also acknowledge that degrowth has not advanced into developing a specific set of economic programs, writing that "degrowth is not a political platform, but rather an 'umbrella concept' that brings together a wide variety of ideas and social struggles." This acknowledgement reflects, in my view, a major ongoing weakness with the degrowth literature, which is that, in concerning itself primarily with very broad themes, it actually gives almost no detailed attention to developing an effective climate stabilization project, or any other specific ecological project. Indeed, this deficiency was reflected in a 2017 interview with the leading ecological economist Herman Daly himself, without question a major intellectual progenitor of the degrowth movement. Daly says in the interview that he is "favorably inclined" toward degrowth, but nevertheless demurs that he is "still waiting for them to get beyond the slogan and develop something a little more concrete."

This lack of specificity among degrowth proponents leads to further problems. For example, degrowth supporters, such as Mastini et al. in their 2021 paper, are clear that they support the transformation of the global energy system along the lines that I have described above, from our current fossil fuel-dominant system to one whose core features are high efficiency and clean renewable energy sources. Yet in fact, building out this new energy system will obviously entail massive *growth* of the global clean energy system, just as it will equally entail the phasing out — or *degrowth*, if you prefer — of the global fossil fuel energy system. In my view, it is more useful to be specific about which sectors of the global economy will certainly need to grow — e.g., the clean energy system — while others, like fossil fuels, contract, as opposed to invoking sweeping generalities about

degrowth. We can extend this point. For example, I am sure degrowth proponents would favor major expansions in access to public education, universal health care, high-quality affordable housing, regenerative agriculture and the share of the Earth's surface covered by forests.

In focusing on some critical specifics, I would also add that there is no way that a general project of degrowth can put the global economy onto a viable climate stabilization path. With the COVID-19 recession, the global economy just went through a powerful natural experiment to demonstrate this point. That is, during the pandemic in 2020, the global economy contracted by 3.5 percent, which the International Monetary Fund [described as](#) a “severe collapse ... that has had acute adverse impacts on women, youth, the poor, the informally employed and those who work in contact-intensive sectors.” In other words, the pandemic produced an intense period of global “degrowth.” This recession did also produce a decline in emissions, as entire sections of the global economy were forced into lockdown mode. But the emissions decline amounted to only [6.4 percent over 2020](#). Remember, the IPCC tells us that we need to cut emissions by 45 percent as of 2030 and be at zero emissions by 2050. If the COVID recession only yields a 6.4 percent emissions reduction despite the enormous levels of economic pain inflicted, clearly “degrowth” cannot come close, on its own, to delivering a 45-percent emissions cut by 2030, much less a zero emissions global economy by 2050.

Those who see the Green New Deal not only as the most effective strategy to tackle global warming but also as an engine growth, such as yourself, rely on the concept of “decoupling,” by which is meant the absolute decoupling of economic growth from carbon emissions. However, degrowth advocates seem to be arguing that there is no empirical evidence for absolute “decoupling,” and that it’s highly unlikely that it will ever happen. How do you respond to such claims?

Let's recognize, to begin with, that people are still going to need to consume energy to light, heat and cool buildings; to power cars, buses, trains and airplanes; and to operate computers and industrial machinery, among other uses. As one critical example here, in low-income economies, delivering adequate supplies of affordable electricity becomes transformative for people's lives, enabling them, for example, to adequately light their homes at night rather than relying on kerosene lanterns. As such, it should be our goal to greatly expand access to electricity to low-income communities throughout the world, while we

are also driving down CO2 emissions to zero. The solution is for energy consumption and economic activity more generally to be absolutely decoupled from the generation of CO2 emissions. That is, the consumption of fossil fuel energy will need to fall steadily and dramatically in absolute terms, even while people will still be able to consume energy resources to meet their various demands. The more modest goal of *relative decoupling* — through which fossil fuel energy consumption and CO2 emissions continue to increase, but at a slower rate than overall economic activity — is therefore not a solution. Economies can still continue to grow while still advancing a viable climate stabilization project as long as the growth process is absolutely decoupled from fossil fuel consumption.

Is absolute decoupling impossible to accomplish within the context of economic growth? To date, we have seen some modest evidence — and I do stress the evidence is *modest* — of absolute decoupling taking place. For example, between 2000 and 2014, [21 countries](#), including the U.S., Germany, the U.K., Spain and Sweden, all managed to absolutely decouple GDP growth from CO2 emissions — i.e., GDP in these countries expanded over this 14-year period while CO2 emissions fell. This is a positive development, but only a small step in the right direction.

The way to deliver a much more rapid pattern of absolute decoupling is, of course, to build out the global clean energy economy, and to do so quickly. This is a feasible project. By [my own estimates](#), it requires that the global economy spend approximately 2.5 percent of global GDP per year on investments in energy efficiency and clean renewable energy supplies, while the global economy grows at an average rate of about 3 percent per year between now and 2050. The [International Renewable Energy Agency](#) and [International Energy Agency](#) recently published studies that reached similar results for the global economy. Focused on the U.S. economy, the energy economists Jim Williams and Ryan Jones also reached a similar result, as part of the [Zero Carbon Action Plan](#) project.

From this and related evidence, I conclude that absolute decoupling is certainly a feasible, though also obviously a hugely challenging, project. But we can't just talk about it, pro or con. We have to make the investments, at 2.5 percent of global GDP per year or thereabouts, every year until 2050, to build the global clean energy economy. If we do that, absolute decoupling will happen. If we don't make those investments, then of course, absolute decoupling becomes an impossibility.

Various ecologically minded activists are also arguing that the Green New Deal relies on the use of massive energy resources, including extensive use of the steel industry, in order to make the transition to a clean, renewable and net-zero emissions economy, and that what is really needed instead is a green revolution of the mind, whereby zero energy living is the ultimate goal. My question is this: Can the Green New Deal deliver 100 percent clean energy?

There are several industries in which energy is consumed intensively. They include steel, cement and paper, along with, obviously, all forms of transportation. But note that these industries are *energy* intensive. They are not necessarily *fossil fuel energy* intensive. If we succeed, through the Green New Deal, in increasing the efficiency at which these industries consume energy and we also deliver abundant supplies of clean renewable energy, then the problems of dealing with energy-intensive industries can be solved. It's true that there will be some specific areas which will present more difficult challenges. For example, some parts of steel production rely on furnaces that are operating at very high temperatures. Reaching these high temperatures are, to date, difficult to achieve through electricity as opposed to burning coal in a furnace. This problem will need to be solved over time. One likely solution could be to rely on laser technology through which the required high temperatures can be reached with electricity, with the electricity, in turn, being produced through renewable energy.

Another more difficult area is long-distance aviation. To date, we cannot rely on electric batteries to fly planes across the Atlantic Ocean, for example, as we can to drive cars from New York to California. One likely solution here will be to fuel the planes' engines with low-emissions liquid bioenergy, such as ethanol produced from agricultural wastes as the raw material. Battery storage capacities are also likely to be improving significantly with more people focusing on [solving exactly this problem](#). Let's remember that the costs of producing electricity from solar photovoltaic panels have fallen by over 80 percent within the past nine years, and the U.S. Energy Department itself [projects further major declines](#) in just the next five years. Moreover, the International Renewable Agency [reported](#) just recently that, for the first time, 62 percent of all renewable energy sources produced energy at lower costs than the *cheapest sources* of fossil fuel energy.

All of this tells me that achieving absolute decoupling is a feasible project within the framework of a global Green New Deal. The Green New Deal, in turn, is, in

my view, the only way through which climate stabilization can become fully consistent with expanding decent work opportunities, raising mass living standards and fighting poverty in all regions of the world.

Source:

<https://truthout.org/degrowth-policies-alone-cannot-avert-climate-crisis-we-need-a-green-new-deal/>

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American Democracy Will Remain A Mirage Without A Dramatic Overhaul Of The Political And

Economic System



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The progressive forces fighting for a democratic future have a truly herculean task ahead of them.

It is no longer an unknown fact or a view propounded by a handful of radical historians and political scientists: the American political system has such severe structural flaws that it is potentially antithetical to democracy and surely detrimental to the promotion of the common good.

Consider the following stark realizations about the condition of American democracy as evidence of the changing times:

The United States has been rated for a number of consecutive years by the Economist Intelligence Union as a “flawed democracy.”

Scores of highly respected mainstream scholars have analyzed massive amounts of data showing that public opinion counts very little in US policymaking (see, for example, Larry Bartels, *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*; Princeton University Press, 2nd ed., 2016) to conclude that the American political system works essentially in a manner that actually subverts the will of the common people.

Others, like Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz, have [argued](#) that, because of rules set in the political system, the American economy is rigged to favor the rich, a view that is obviously wholeheartedly endorsed by Kishore Mahbubani, Distinguished Fellow from Asia Research Institute, at the National University of Singapore, when he declares that the US functions like a democracy but is actually a [plutocracy](#).

And Timothy K. Kuhner, Professor of Law at the University of Auckland, has gone even further by [arguing](#) most convincingly in *King's Law Journal* that the United States isn't only a plutocracy, but the only plutocracy in the world to be established by law.

To a large extent, of course, the structural flaws in the American political system have their origins in the many anti-democratic elements found in the Constitution. This is the [view](#) of eminent constitutional scholars such as Erwin Chemerinsky, Dean and Distinguished Professor of Law at Berkeley Law School, and Sanford Levinson, W. St. John Garwood and W. St. John Garwood, Jr. Centennial Chair in Law at the University of Texas Law School, and author of *Our Undemocratic Constitution* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

Let's start with one of the basic principles of democracy which is "one person, one vote." It is not applicable to the case of American "democracy" where US presidents are chosen by electors, not by popular vote. Hence the "democratic" anomaly of a candidate elected to become the 45th president of the United States after having lost the popular vote by a bigger margin than any other US president. Indeed, Donald Trump was elected president by trailing Hillary Clinton by nearly three million votes. The same thing happened in 2000, when Al Gore won nearly half a million more votes than George W. Bush, but it was Bush who won the presidency by being declared winner in the state of Florida by less than 540 votes.

In any other modern democratic system, such electoral outcomes would be imaginable only if democracy was crushed by some kind of a military coup with the aim of installing in power the "preferred" candidate of the ruling class.

To be sure, there is nothing in the Constitution that grants American voters the right to choose their president. When American voters go to the polls to vote for a presidential candidate, what they are essentially doing is casting a vote for their preferred party's nominated slate of electors.

The electoral college system is democracy's ugliest anachronism. It was designed by the founding fathers in order to prevent the masses from choosing directly who will run the country, and it's simply shocking that it still exists more than two hundred years later.

The existence of the electoral college system also helps to explain why voter turnout for the presidential elections in the world's most outdated democratic model is consistently disturbingly low. More than 90 million eligible voters did not vote in the 2016 presidential election, in what was considered to be one of the most important elections in many generations because of the inflammatory and racist rhetoric of Donald Trump, and while there was a bigger turnout in 2020,

the US is still incredibly low compared with other advanced democratic nations around the world when it comes to electoral participation, ranking 31st out of 35 developed countries in 2016, and 24th in 2020, respectively.

The existence of the two-party system (yet another “democratic” anomaly), and even the fact that elections are being held on a day when most people work, are also reasons for the low voter turnout in the US.

In addition, one could also argue that the reason why so many Americans are abstaining from voting, a cornerstone of democracy, is intrinsically related to the long-stemming pathologies of the American political culture, namely due to the manufacturing of a highly individualistic and consumer-driven society intended to promote conformism, ignorance and apathy about public affairs all while the rich and powerful control policymaking.

However, an even bigger “democratic” anomaly than the presence of the electoral college system revolves around US senate representation. A tiny state such as Wyoming, with barely 600,000 residents, has the same number of Senators on Capitol Hill as does California, with nearly 40 million residents. This translates, roughly, to Wyoming voters having 70 times more Senate representation than California voters. Moreover, since most of the smaller states have overwhelmingly white residents, it also means that whites have much larger representation in the Senate than Black and Hispanic Americans.

The undemocratic nature of Senate representation might not have been such a huge problem if its powers were similar to those of upper houses found in many other countries in the world, which tend to be overwhelmingly less than those of the lower houses. In the US, however, the Senate is far more powerful than the House of Representatives as it has virtually complete control over federal legislating and acts as the gatekeeper on treaties, cabinet approvals, and nominations to the Supreme Court.

Yet, perhaps an even bigger insult and injury to the body politic and the promotion of the common good in the U.S. is the privatization of democracy through the role of money in campaigns and elections. Campaign finance laws in the U.S. always posed at least an indirect threat to democracy by allowing private money to play a very prominent role in the financing of elections, but the 2010 Supreme Court ruling in *Citizens United vs Federal Election Commission*, which shifted even further the influence of dark money on politics by reversing whatever

campaign finance restrictions were still in place and essentially declaring that corporations were effectively citizens and thus could spend unlimited funds on elections, robbed America of whatever hopes and aspirations it may have had of attaining a somewhat well-functioning democratic political system.

Taking everything into account, it is clear that, even though the United States remains a free and open society, conditions which have allowed greater exposure and by extension more public awareness of the structural flaws in the country's political system, the progressive forces fighting for a democratic future have a truly herculean task ahead of them.

While changing the constitution, creating a multiparty system, and fighting the corrupting influence of money in politics are absolute necessities for democracy to function—just as surely as a Green New Deal is an absolute must to protect the environment and save the planet—the anti-democratic forces of this country are working even harder these days to destroy whatever is left of American democracy.

Republicans are bent on restricting voting rights as part of a concerted effort to change the rules in a way that they will impact on the demographic shifts favoring the Democrats. The campaign for restrictive voting legislation goes all the way back to the end of the 20th century, so what we are witnessing today is just a new wave of intensification to roll back decades of progress on voting rights.

The thoroughly anti-democratic and racist mindset of Republican Senators could not have been more glaringly revealed than with their recent use of a Jim Crow relic—the filibuster—to block the most extensive voting rights bill in a generation. Now, activists are concentrating on eliminating the filibuster, which, naturally, should have no place in a normal democracy.

Yet, eliminating the filibuster while everything else stays the same in connection with the workings of the American political system and its institutions carries certain undeniable risks given that the most reactionary and outright proto-fascist forces in today's political universe are feverishly working on retaking power—first in the 2022 midterm elections, and then in 2024, in the presidential elections. As such, progressives should never lose sight of the importance of always maintaining a multi-level strategy for addressing and hopefully fixing the nation's outdated political system and rigged economy.

Indeed, the American political system needs a dramatic overhaul due to its many structural flaws. Without one, American democracy will remain a mirage.

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Chomsky: Republicans Are Willing To Destroy Democracy To Retake Power



Noam Chomsky

Today's Republican Party is an extremist force that no longer qualifies as a mainstream political party and is surely not interested in participating in "normal" politics. In fact, today's GOP is so wrapped around extreme and irrational beliefs that even Europe's far-right parties and movements, including Marine Le Pen's National Rally, seem conventional in comparison.

The GOP's political identity has been dramatically shaped by former President Donald Trump, but these recent shifts would not have been possible if there weren't already an array of groups across U.S. society and culture (including white supremacists, right-wing Evangelical Christians and Second Amendment activists, to name just a few) that have long embraced extremist and "proto-fascist" views about the way the country should be governed and the values that it should hold. For them, Trump was and remains America's "great white hope." In this context, Trump's voting base — which continues to believe in the idea of a stolen election and to support Trump-led GOP efforts to stamp critical race theory out of schools and restrict voting rights — speaks volumes about the anti-democratic and threatening nature of today's GOP.

In the interview that follows, world-renowned scholar and activist Noam Chomsky explains what has happened to the Republican Party and why even more than democracy is at stake if the "proto-fascist" forces inspired by Trump return to power.

C.J. Polychroniou: Over the course of the past few decades, the Republican Party has gone through a series of ideological transformations — from traditional conservatism to reactionism and finally to what we may define as "proto-fascism" where the irrational has become the driving force. How do we explain what has happened to the GOP?

Noam Chomsky: Your term "[neoliberal proto-fascism](#)" seems to me quite an

accurate characterization of the current Republican organization — I’m hesitant to call them a “Party” because that might suggest that they have some interest in participating honestly in normal parliamentary politics. More fitting, I think, is the judgment of American Enterprise Institute political analysts Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein that the modern Republican Party has transformed to a “radical insurgency” with disdain for democratic participation. That was before the Trump-McConnell hammer blows of the past few years, which drove the conclusion home more forcefully.

The term “neoliberal proto-fascism” captures well both the features of the current party and the distinction from the fascism of the past. The commitment to the most brutal form of neoliberalism is apparent in the legislative record, crucially the subordination of the party to private capital, the inverse of classic fascism. But the fascist symptoms are there, including extreme racism, violence, worship of the leader (sent by God, according to former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo), immersion in a world of “alternative facts” and a frenzy of irrationality. Also in other ways, such as the extraordinary efforts in Republican-run states to suppress teaching in schools that doesn’t conform to their white supremacist doctrines. Legislation is being enacted to ban instruction in “critical race theory,” the new demon, replacing Communism and Islamic terror as the plague of the modern age. “Critical race theory” is the scare-phrase used for the study of the systematic structural and cultural factors in the hideous 400-year history of slavery and enduring racist repression. Proper indoctrination in schools and universities must ban this heresy. What actually happened for 400 years and is very much alive today must be presented to students as a deviation from the real America, pure and innocent, much as in well-run totalitarian states.

What’s missing from “proto-fascism” is the ideology: state control of the social order, including the business classes, and party control of the state with the maximal leader in charge. That could change. German industry and finance at first thought they could use the Nazis as their instrument in beating down labor and the left while remaining in charge. They learned otherwise. The current split between the more traditional corporate leadership and the Trump-led party is suggestive of something similar, but only remotely. We are far from the conditions that led to Mussolini, Hitler, and their cohorts.

On the driving force of irrationality, the facts are inescapable and should be of deep concern. Though we can’t credit Trump entirely with the achievement, he

certainly has shown great skill in carrying out a challenging assignment: implementing policies for the benefit of his primary constituency of great wealth and corporate power while conning the victims into worshipping him as their savior. That's no mean achievement, and inducing an atmosphere of utter irrationality has been a primary instrument, a virtual prerequisite.

We should distinguish the voting base, now pretty much owned by Trump, from the political echelon (Congress) — and distinguish both from a more shadowy elite that really runs the Party, McConnell and associates.

[Attitudes among the voting base](#) are truly ominous. Put aside the fact that a large majority of Trump voters believe that the elections were stolen. A majority also believe that “The traditional American way of life is disappearing so fast that we may have to use force to save it” and 40 percent take a stronger stand: “if elected leaders will not protect America, the people must do it themselves, even if it requires violent actions.” Not surprising, perhaps, when [a quarter of Republicans](#) are reported to believe that “the government, media, and financial worlds in the US are controlled by a group of Satan-worshipping pedophiles who run a global child sex trafficking operation.”

In the background are more realistic concerns about the disappearance of “the traditional American way of life”: a Christian and white supremacist world where Black people “know their place” and there are no infections from “deviants” who call for gay rights and other such obscenities. That traditional way of life indeed is disappearing.

There are also elements of realism in the various “great replacement” theories that seem to consume much of the Trump base. Putting aside absurdities about immigration and elite plotting, a simple look at distribution of births suffices to show that white domination is declining.

It's also worth remembering the deep roots of these concerns. Among the founders, there were two distinguished figures of the Enlightenment, one of whom hoped that the new country would be free of “blot or mixture,” red or black (Jefferson), while the other felt that Germans and Swedes should perhaps be barred entry because they are too “swarthy” (Franklin). Myths of Anglo-Saxon origin were prevalent through the 19th century. All of this is apart from the virulent racism and its horrifying manifestations.

Concerns about satanic cults are dangerous enough, but other deeply irrational beliefs are far more consequential. One of the most threatening revelations of recent days was a scarcely noticed observation in [the latest report of a Yale University group](#) that monitors attitudes on climate change — the euphemism for the heating of the planet that will end organized human life on earth unless soon brought under control. The report found that “Over the past year, there has been a sharp decline in the percentages of both liberal/moderate Republicans and conservative Republicans who think developing sources of clean energy should be a priority for the president and Congress. The current numbers are all-time lows since we first asked the question in 2010.”

Meanwhile every day’s news provides information about new potential disasters — for example, the June 11 release of studies reporting [the accelerated collapse of a huge Antarctic glacier](#) that might raise sea levels by a foot and a half — along with reminders by the scientists reporting the warning that “The future is still open to change — if people do what is needed to change it.”

They won’t, as long as the reported attitudes prevail. Unless overcome, they might be a kiss of death if the current strategy of the Republican Party succeeds in putting the wreckers back in power. The strategy is plain enough: no matter what the harm to the country, and to their own voting base, ensure that the Biden administration can do nothing to remedy severe domestic problems, and ram through Jim Crow-style legislation to block voting of people of color and the poor, counting on the acquiescence of the reactionary judiciary that McConnell-Trump have succeeded in installing.

The party is not a lost cause. The Democrats have helped by failing to provide a constructive alternative that answers to the needs and just aspirations of many of those who have flocked to the Trump banner. That can change. Furthermore, attitudes are shifting among younger Republicans, [even among younger Evangelicals](#), a core part of the Republican base since the ‘70s.

Nothing is irremediable.

With regard to the political echelon, there is little to say. With fringe exceptions, they have abandoned any semblance of integrity. Current votes are a clear indication: Total Republican opposition to measures that they know are favored by their constituents in order to ensure that the Biden administration can achieve

nothing.

The most abject capitulation of the political echelon was on global warming. In 2008, Republican presidential candidate John McCain had a limited climate plank in his program, and congressional Republicans were considering related legislation. The Koch energy conglomerate responded in force, and any spark of independence was extinguished. That much was evident in the last Republican primaries in 2016, pre-Trump: 100 percent denial that what is happening is happening, or worse, saying maybe it is but we're going to race toward disaster without apologizing (as said John Kasich, who was honored for his integrity by being invited to speak at the 2020 Democratic convention).

I can't raise any objections whatsoever to what you say, but I am a bit baffled by Biden's insistence in trying to reach out to Republicans on some of the major issues confronting the country. Isn't bipartisanship a pipe dream?

Not entirely. Democratic majority leader Chuck Schumer did manage a triumph of bipartisanship. Abandoning a prior commitment to legislation on global warming, Schumer teamed up with Republican Todd Young to conceal [a limited industrial policy program within a "hate China" bill](#) that appealed to shared jingoist sentiments. Republicans ensured that such significant components as funding for the National Science Foundation would be whittled down. Young celebrated the triumph by declaring that "when future generations of Americans cast their gaze towards new frontiers," they won't see "a red flag planted" there, but our own red, white, and blue. What better reason could there be to try to revive domestic manufacturing while trying to undermine the Chinese economy — at a moment when cooperation is a prerequisite for survival.

Meanwhile Biden's Department of Defense is reorienting resources and planning to war with China, a form of madness barely receiving attention, analyzed in detail in Issue #1 of the [Committee for a Sane U.S.-China Policy](#), June 11, 2021.

Trump has transformed the Republican Party into a cult of personality. Is this why Republican leaders blocked the creation of a commission to investigate the January 6 attack on Capitol?

Trump has captured the voting base, but the political echelon faces a quandary. For a long time, the party elite has been a rich man's club, pandering to business power even more than the Democrats, even after the Democrats abandoned the

working class in the '70s, becoming a party of Wall St. and affluent professionals.

The business world was willing to tolerate Trump's antics as long as he was loyally serving them — with some distaste, since he tarnished the image they project of "soulful corporations." But for major sectors, January 6 was too much.

The McConnell types who run the party are caught between a raging voting base in thrall to Trump and the masters of the economy whom they serve. A commission of inquiry, if at all honest, would have deepened this rift, which they have to find a way to paper over if the party, such as it is, is to survive. Best then to cancel it.

Lies, propaganda, and restricting voting rights have become the governing principles of today's GOP. To what extent will the new voting restrictions work to the advantage of the Republican Party, and how will they impact on the current political climate in general and the future of whatever is left of democracy in the United States in particular?

Trump's highly effective strategy of legitimizing "alternative facts" was based on an endless flood of lies, but a few true statements floated in the debris. One was his comment that Republicans can never win a fair election. That's a real problem for the rich man's club. It's hard to garner votes with the slogan "I want to rob you. Vote for me." That leaves only a few options. One is to prevent the "wrong people" from voting. Another is to shape the party program so that policy is concealed by appeals to "cultural issues." Both have been actively pursued. Trump gave the practices a particularly vulgar twist in his usual style, but he didn't invent them.

The current wave of Republican Jim Crow-style legislation is understandable: Trump's observation is accurate, and is likely to be more so in the future with demographic changes and the tendency of younger voters to favor social justice and human rights, among Republicans as well. The efforts have become more feasible after the Roberts Court gutted the Voting Rights Act in the Shelby decision in 2013, which "set the stage for a new era of white hegemony," [as Vann Newkirk rightly observed](#).

Displacement of policy by "cultural issues" traces back to Nixon's southern strategy. With Democrats beginning to support mild civil rights legislation, Nixon and his advisers recognized that they could switch the southern vote to

Republican by racist appeals, barely disguised.

Under Reagan there was little disguise; racist rhetoric and practices came naturally to him. Meanwhile the Republican Christian nationalist strategist Paul Weyrich easily convinced the political leadership that by abandoning their former “pro-choice” stands and pretending to oppose abortion, they could pick up the northern Catholic and newly politicized Evangelical vote. Gun-loving was soon added to the mix, by now reaching such weird absurdities as the recent [Benitez decision overturning California’s ban on assault rifles](#), which are, after all, hardly different from Swiss army knives [according to Benitez]. Trump added more to the mix. Like his fellow demagogues in Europe, he understood well that refugees can be used to whip up xenophobic passions and fears. His racist appeals also went beyond the norm.

Trump has exhibited a certain genius in tapping poisons that run not far below the surface of American society and culture. By such means, he managed to capture the Republican voting base. The party leadership is dedicated to the obstructionist strategy of sacrificing the interests of the country in order to regain power. That leaves the country with one functioning political party, itself torn between the neoliberal leadership and a younger social democratic voting base.

Your phrase “whatever is left of American democracy” is to the point. However progressive it might have been in the 18th century — and there is much to say about that — by today’s standards American democracy is deeply flawed in ways that were already becoming clear to the leading Framer, James Madison by 1791, when he wrote to Jefferson deploring “the daring depravity of the times,” as the “stockjobbers will become the pretorian band of the government — at once its tools and its tyrant; bribed by its largesses, and overawing it by clamors and combinations.”

That could well be a description of recent years, particularly as the neoliberal assault achieved its entirely predictable consequence of placing government even more at the command of concentrations of private power than before. The “largesses” are too familiar to review. Ample research in mainstream political science has shown that the “clamors and combinations” have left the majority of voters unrepresented, as their own representatives heed the voices of the super-rich, wealthy donors and corporate lobbyists.

The most recent study, using sophisticated AI techniques, dispels “notions that anyone’s opinion about public policy outside of the top 10 percent of affluent Americans independently helps to explain policy.” [Thomas Ferguson](#), the leading academic scholar of the power of the “tools and tyrants” of government, concludes: “Knowing the policy area, the preferences of the top 10 percent, and the views of a handful of interest groups suffice to explain policy changes with impressive accuracy.”

But some vestiges of democracy remain, even after the neoliberal assault.
Probably not for long if neoliberal “proto-fascism” extends its sway.

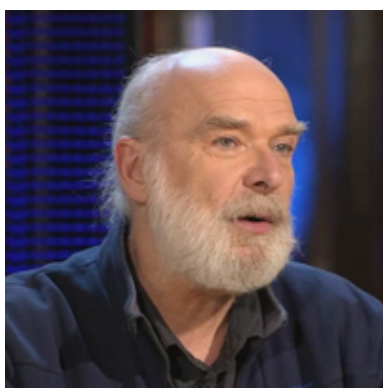
But the fate of democracy won’t actually matter much if the “proto-fascists” regain power. The environment that sustains life cannot long endure the wreckers of the Trump era of decline. Little else will matter if irreversible tipping points are passed.

Source:

<https://truthout.org/articles/chomsky-republicans-are-willing-to-jeopardize-human-survival-to-retake-power/>

C.J. Polychroniou is a political economist/political scientist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. Currently, his main research interests are in European economic integration, globalization, climate change, the political economy of the United States, and the deconstruction of neoliberalism’s politico-economic project. He is a regular contributor to *Truthout* as well as a member of *Truthout*’s Public Intellectual Project. He has published scores of books, and his articles have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into several foreign languages, including Arabic, Croatian, Dutch, French, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. His latest books are [Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change](#), an anthology of interviews with Chomsky originally published at *Truthout* and collected by Haymarket Books; *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors); and *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change*, an anthology of interviews with Chomsky originally published at *Truthout* and collected by Haymarket Books (scheduled for publication in June 2021).

To Address Increasing Inequality And Global Poverty, We Must Cancel Debt



*Éric Toussaint – Photo:
cadtm.org*

Massive debt levels are a feature of contemporary capitalism that cannot be eradicated without radical change, says political scientist Éric Toussaint.

“The indebtedness of the working classes is directly connected to the widening poverty gap and increasing inequality, and to the demolition of the welfare state that most governments have been working at since the 1980s,” says Toussaint in this exclusive interview for *Truthout*.

Toussaint — a historian and international spokesperson for the *Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debt* (CADTM), and author of several books on debt, development and globalization — shares his thoughts on debt, inequality and contemporary socialist movements in the conversation that follows.

C.J. Polychroniou: Over the past few decades, inequality is rising in many countries around the world, both across the Global North and the Global South,

creating what UN Chief António Guterres called in his foreword to the World Social Report 2020 “a deeply unequal global landscape.” Moreover, the top 1 percent of the population are the big winners in the globalized capitalist economy of the 21st century. Is inequality an inevitable development in the face of globalization, or the outcome of politics and policies at the level of individual countries?

Éric Toussaint: Rising inequality is not inevitable. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the explosion of inequality is consubstantial with the phase that the world capitalist system [entered into in the 1970s](#). The evolution of inequality in the capitalist system is directly related to the balance of power between the fundamental social classes, between capital and labor. When I use the term “labor,” that means urban wage-earners as well as rural workers and small-scale farming producers.

The evolution of capitalism can be divided into broad periods according to the evolution of inequality and the social balance of power. Inequality increased between the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the first half of the 19th century and the policies implemented by the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt in the United States in the 1930s, and then decreased up to the early 1980s. In Europe, the turn towards lower inequality lagged 10 years behind the United States. It was not until the end of World War II and the final defeat of Nazism that inequality-reducing policies were put in place, whether in Western Europe or Moscow-led Eastern Europe. In the major economies of Latin America, there was a reduction in inequality from the 1930s to the 1970s, notably during the presidencies of Lázaro Cárdenas in Mexico and Juan D. Perón in Argentina. In the period from the 1930s to the 1970s, there were massive social struggles. In many capitalist countries, capital had to make concessions to labor in order to stabilize the system. In some cases, the radical nature of social struggles led to revolutions, as in China in 1949 and Cuba in 1959.

The return to policies that strongly aggravated inequality began in the 1970s in Latin America and part of Asia. From 1973 onward, the dictatorship of Gen. Augusto Pinochet (advised by the “[Chicago Boys](#),” the Chilean economists who had studied laissez-faire economics at the University of Chicago with Milton Friedman), the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines, and the dictatorships in Argentina and Uruguay are just a few examples of countries where neoliberal policies were first put into practice.

These neoliberal policies, which produced a sharp increase in inequality, became widespread from 1979 in Great Britain under Margaret Thatcher, from 1980 in the United States under the Reagan administration, from 1982 in Germany under the Kohl government, and in 1982-1983 in France after François Mitterrand's turn to the right.

Inequality increased sharply with the capitalist restoration in the countries of the former Soviet bloc in Central and Eastern Europe. In China from the second half of the 1980s onward, the policies dictated by Deng Xiaoping also led to a gradual restoration of capitalism and a rise in inequality.

It is also quite clear that for the ideologues of the capitalist system and for many international organizations, a rise in inequality is a necessary condition for economic growth.

It should be noted that the World Bank does not consider a rising level of inequality as negative. Indeed, it adopts the theory developed in the 1950s by the [economist Simon Kuznets](#), according to which a country whose economy takes off and progresses must necessarily go through a phase of increasing inequality. According to this dogma, inequality will start to fall as soon as the country has reached a higher threshold of development. It is a version of pie in the sky used by the ruling classes to placate the oppressed on whom they impose a life of suffering.

The need for rising inequalities is well rooted into World Bank philosophy. Eugene Black, World Bank president in April 1961, [said](#): "Income inequalities are the natural result of the economic growth which is the people's escape route from an existence of poverty." However, empirical studies by the World Bank in the 1970s at the time when Hollis Chenery was chief economist contradict the Kuznets theory.

In [*Capital in the Twenty-First Century*](#), Thomas Piketty presents a very interesting analysis of the Kuznets curve. Piketty mentions that at first, Kuznets himself doubted the real interest of the curve. That did not stop him from developing an economic theory that keeps bouncing back and, like all economists who serve orthodoxy well, receiving the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences (1971). Since then, inequalities have reached levels never before seen in the history of humanity. This is the result of the dynamism of global capitalism and the support

it receives from international institutions that are charged with “development” and governments that favor the interests of the 1 percent over those of the enormous mass of the population, as much in the developed countries as in the rest of the world.

In 2021, the World Bank reviewed the Arab Spring of 2011 by claiming, against all evidence, that the level of inequality was low in the entire Arab region, and this worried them greatly as it was symptomatic of faults in the region’s supposed economic success. As faithful followers of Kuznets’ theory, Vladimir Hlasny and Paolo Verme [argue in a paper](#) published by the World Bank that “low inequality is not an indicator of a healthy economy.”

Gilbert Achcar summarizes the position taken by Paolo Verme of the World Bank as follows: “[in the view of the 2014 World Bank study](#), it is inequality aversion, not inequality per se, that should be deplored, since inequality must inevitably rise with development from a Kuznetsian perspective.”

Finally, the coronavirus pandemic has further increased the inequality in the distribution of income and wealth. Inequality in the face of disease and death has also increased dramatically.

Neoliberal policies have created massive debt levels for so-called emerging markets and developing countries, with debt threatening to create a global development emergency. What’s the most realistic solution to the debt crisis in developing countries?

The solution is obvious. [Debt payments must be suspended](#) without any penalty payments being paid for the delay. Beyond suspension of payment, each country must carry out debt audits with the active participation of citizens, in order to determine the illegitimate, odious, illegal and/or unsustainable parts, which must be canceled. After a crisis of the size of the present one, the slates must be wiped clean, as has happened many times before throughout human history. David Graeber reminded us of this in his important book, [Debt: The First 5,000 Years](#).

From the point of view of the [CADTM](#), a global network mainly active in the Global South but also in the North, the need to suspend payments and cancel debt does not only concern developing countries, whether they are emerging or not. It also concerns peripheral countries in the North like Greece and semi-colonies like Puerto Rico.

It is time to dare to speak out about canceling the abusive debts demanded of the working classes. Private banks and other private bodies have put great energy into developing policy of lending to ordinary people who turn to borrowing because their incomes are insufficient to pay for higher education or health care. In the U.S., student debt has reached over \$1.7 trillion, with \$165 billion worth of student loans in default, while a large part of mortgages are subjected to abusive conditions (as the subprime crisis clearly showed from 2007). The terms of certain consumer debts are also abusive, [as are most debts linked to micro-credit in the South](#).

Indebtedness of the working classes is directly connected to the widening poverty gap and increasing inequality, and to the demolition of the welfare state that most governments have been working at since the 1980s. This is true all over the world: whether in Chile, Colombia, the Arabic-speaking region, Japan, Europe or the United States. As neoliberal policies dismantle their systems of protection, people are obliged, in turn, to incur debt as individuals to compensate for the fact that the states no longer fulfil the obligation incumbent upon them to protect, promote and enact human rights. Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya and Nancy Fraser emphasized this in their book, [Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto](#).

What are the alternatives for a sustainable model of development?

As stated in the [manifesto, "End the system of private patents!"](#):
The health crisis is far from being resolved. The capitalist system and neoliberal policies have been at the helm at all stages. At the root of this virus is the unbridled transformation of the relationship between the human species and nature. The ecological and health crises are intimately intertwined.

Governments and big capital will not be deterred from their offensive against the populations unless a vast and determined movement forces them to make concessions.

Among new attacks that must be resisted are the acceleration of automation/robotization of work; the generalization of working from home, where employees are isolated, have even less control of their time and must themselves assume many more of the costs related to their work tools than if they worked physically in their offices; a development of distance learning that deepens cultural and social inequality; the reinforcement of control over private life and

over private data; the reinforcement of repression, etc.

The question of public debt remains a central element of social and political struggles. Public debt continues to explode in volume because governments are borrowing massively in order to avoid taxing the rich to pay for the measures taken to resist the COVID-19 pandemic, and it will not be long before they resume their austerity offensive. Illegitimate private debt will become an ever-greater daily burden for working people. Consequently, the struggle for the abolition of illegitimate debt must gain renewed vigor.

The struggles that [arose] on several continents during June 2020, notably massive anti-racist struggles around the Black Lives Matter movement, show that youth and the working classes do not accept the status quo. In 2021, huge popular mobilizations [in Colombia](#) and more recently in Brazil have provided new evidence of massive resistance among Latin American peoples.

We must contribute as much as possible to the rise of a new and powerful social and political movement capable of mustering the social struggles and elaborating a program that breaks away from capitalism and promotes anti-capitalist, anti-racist, ecological, feminist and socialist visions. It is fundamental to work toward a [socialization of banks with expropriation of major shareholders](#); a [moratorium of public debt repayment while an audit with citizens' participation is carried out to repudiate its illegitimate part](#); the imposition of a high rate of taxation on the highest assets and incomes; the cancelation of unjust personal debts (student debt, abusive mortgage loans); the closure of stock markets, which are places of speculation; a radical reduction of working hours (without loss of pay) in order to create a large number of socially useful jobs; a radical increase in public expenditure, particularly in health care and education; the socialization of pharmaceutical companies and of the energy sector; the re-localization of as much manufacturing as possible and the development of short supply chains, as well as many other essential demands.

A few years ago, you argued that the socialist project has been betrayed and needs to be reinvented in the 21st century. What should socialism look like in today's world, and how can it be achieved?

In the present day, the socialist project must be feminist, ecologist, anti-capitalist, anti-racist, internationalist and self-governing. In 2021, we commemorate the

150th anniversary of the Paris Commune when people set up a form of democratic self-government. It was a combination of self-organization and forms of power delegation that could be questioned at any moment, since all mandates could be revoked at the behest of the people. It has to be clearly stated that the emancipation of the oppressed will be brought about by the oppressed themselves, or will not happen at all. Socialism will only be attained if the peoples of the world consciously set themselves the goal of constructing it, and if they give themselves the means to prevent authoritarian or dictatorial degradation and the bureaucratization of the new society.

What Rosa Luxemburg said in 1918 is as valid today as it was then: “[without a free and untrammelled press, without the unlimited right of association and assemblage](#), the rule of the broad masses of the people is entirely unthinkable.”

[She added:](#)

Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party — however numerous they may be — is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently. Not because of any fanatical concept of “justice” but because all that is instructive, wholesome and purifying in political freedom depends on this essential characteristic, and its effectiveness vanishes when “freedom” becomes a special privilege.

Faced with the multidimensional crisis of capitalism hurtling towards the abyss due to the environmental crisis, modifying capitalism is no longer a proper option. It would merely be a lesser evil which would not bring the radical solutions that the situation requires.

This interview has been lightly edited for clarity.

Source:

<https://truthout.org/to-address-increasing-inequality-and-global-poverty-we-must-cancel-debt/>

C.J. Polychroniou is a political economist/political scientist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. Currently, his main research interests are in European economic integration, globalization, climate change, the political economy of the United States, and the deconstruction of neoliberalism’s politico-economic project. He is a regular contributor to *Truthout* as well as a member of *Truthout’s* Public

Intellectual Project. He has published scores of books, and his articles have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into several foreign languages, including Arabic, Croatian, Dutch, French, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. His latest books are [*Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change*](#), an anthology of interviews with Chomsky originally published at *Truthout* and collected by Haymarket Books; *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors); and *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change*, an anthology of interviews with Chomsky originally published at *Truthout* and collected by Haymarket Books (scheduled for publication in June 2021).

Sustainable Peace Must End Israeli Apartheid. Anything Else Is Just A Ceasefire



Richard Falk

After four elections in less than two years, Benjamin Netanyahu's record 12-year rule comes officially to an end on Sunday.

The government to replace him consists of a coalition of eight parties from across Israel's political spectrum and will be led by the ultranationalist Naftali Bennett who will serve for the first two years.

Indeed, indicative of the direction of Israeli politics and society over the course of the last 15 years or so, the end of the corrupt and much-maligned Netanyahu reign may be no reason for celebration, as it will be replaced not simply by a coalition government built around numerous structural contradictions, but by one that may potentially prove to be far more reactionary and dangerous.

The situation is grave for Palestinians, who only a few weeks ago experienced under Netanyahu's orders yet another massive assault on Gaza, which ended in the death of more than 200 people including dozens of children, and widespread damage to the enclave's infrastructure. The person to replace Netanyahu as prime minister is a religious extremist who has been a vocal advocate of Israeli settlements and a fervent opponent of a Palestinian state.

The dawn of the new era in Israeli politics starts with the latest cycle of violence against the Palestinians, which seems to have been directly related to the reality of domestic Israeli politics in general and the policy of ethnic cleansing in particular. This is the view of Richard Falk, one of the world's most insightful and cited scholars of international affairs over the course of the last half century, as made clear in the exclusive interview below for *Truthout*. Falk is professor emeritus of International Law at Princeton University, Chair of Global Law at Queen Mary University of London, former United Nations Human Rights Rapporteur on human rights in the Palestinian territories, and author of more than fifty books and thousands of essays in global politics and international law.

C.J. Polychroniou: Richard, the latest Israeli attack, which caused massive destruction in the Gaza Strip, ended with a ceasefire after growing U.S. and international pressure after 11 days. In your view, what factors or parties reignited the violence?

Richard Falk: This latest upsurge of violence in the relations between Israel and Palestine seems to arise from a combination of circumstances.... It is clear that Israel's usual claim of a right to defend itself is far from the whole story, especially when its behavior seemed designed to provoke Hamas to act in response. In light of this, we should investigate why Israel wanted to launch a major military operation against Gaza at this time when the situation seemed quiet.

The easiest answer to the question — to save Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin

Netanyahu's skin. It seems that the precarious political position and legal vulnerability of the Israeli leader, is the best back story, but far from a complete picture. It helps account for the seemingly reckless Israeli provocations that preceded the flurry of rockets from Hamas and affiliates. Netanyahu had failed three times to form a government and was facing an opposition coalition that was effectively poised to displace him as leader. If displaced as prime minister, Netanyahu would have to face substantial criminal charges for fraud, bribery and breach of public trust in Israeli courts, which could result in a jail sentence.

Why would a wily leader and ardent nationalist play roulette with the well-being of Israel? The answer seems to involve the character of the man rather than an astute policy calculation.... To the extent the Netanyahu approach was knowledge-based, it reflected the reasonable belief that Israelis put aside differences and give their total allegiance to the head of state during a wartime interlude. Netanyahu had every reason to believe that in this situation, as so often in the past, Israelis would rally around the flag, and be thankful for his leadership in a security crisis.

There is no doubt that Israeli behavior preceding the rockets was so inflammatory that we must assume it was intended to be highly provocative. First came high-profile evictions of six Palestinian families from their Sheikh Jarrah homes on flimsy legal grounds, with a prospect of more evictions to follow. These court rulings enraged the Palestinians. It reinforced their sense of continuing victimization taking the form of insecurity as to Palestinian residence rights in East Jerusalem, perceived as ethnic cleansing. This reawakened the memories of the 700,000 or more Palestinians who fled or were forced across the borders of what became Israel to Jordan, Lebanon, Gaza and the West Bank (until 1967 under Jordanian administration) in the 1948 War, becoming refugees, and never thereafter allowed to return to their homes or homeland, which was and is their right under international law.

This process of coercive demographic rebalancing was integral to the essential racial and idealistic character of the Zionist movement, which sought to establish not only a Jewish state but a democracy that could qualify for political legitimacy by Western criteria. To achieve this goal, however, depended on implementing policies ensuring and maintaining a secure Jewish-majority population, [policies] which were themselves denial of fundamental human rights. These controversial Sheikh Jarrah evictions were continuing this Judaizing of East Jerusalem after

more than 70 years since Israel was founded. In other words, what Israeli Jews treated as a demographic imperative that was almost synonymous with maintaining a Jewish state for the Palestinians had the character of a continuous process of ethnic cleansing, which meant second-class citizenship and living with perpetual insecurity.

Days before the rockets were launched, there was further provocation that took the form of unregulated marches by right-wing Jewish settlers through Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem carrying posters and shouting, "Death to the Arabs," coupled with random acts of violence against Palestinians and their property. Such events reinforced the impression that the Palestinians in Israel were acutely insecure and vulnerable to thuggish manifestations of settler racism and would not be protected by the Israeli state. This pattern exhibited the jagged edges of Israel's distinctive version of apartheid.

Likely, the most provocative of all these events ... were the several intrusions at al-Aqsa compound and mosque by Israeli security forces in a manner that obstructed Muslim worship during the last days of Ramadan. As well, Muslims were prevented from coming to al-Aqsa from the West Bank during this period. These encroachments on freedom of religion again seemed designed to provoke Palestinian reactions of resistance by harshly discriminatory practices of Israeli interpretations of "law and order."

Against this background, Palestinian protests mounted, and Hamas undoubtedly felt challenged to maintain its claim as the inspirational leader of Palestinian resistance. Because of the limited options available to Hamas, resistance took the characteristic form of firing hundreds of primitive rockets, many falling harmlessly or intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome defense system. The rockets were indiscriminate and inflicted some Israeli casualties, minor damage to towns in southern Israel. Such a tactic violates international humanitarian law, and is undoubtedly very frightening to the Israeli civilian population.

It should be appreciated that Israel's violations far outweighed the violations of the Palestinians in several crucial respects: the death and destruction caused by the two sides; the refusal of Israel to uphold its legal obligations as the occupying power toward the civilian occupied Palestinian people who were already long subjugated by an unlawful blockade (in place since 2007) responsible for

unemployment levels over 50 percent and dependence on humanitarian aid by over 80 percent of the Gazan population. Israel also ignored its specific duty outlined in Article 55 of the Fourth Geneva Convention to protect the civilian population during a time of “contagious disease or epidemic,” and instead subjected Palestinians to what has been described as “medical apartheid,” which was most evident on the West Bank where all Jewish settlers were vaccinated while almost no Palestinians received even a first dose.

The Arab world condemned the latest Israeli assault, but took no action. My question about this is twofold: First, to what extent did the Abraham Accords, which normalized relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, precipitate the renewal of violence? And, second, what’s behind the cozy relationship between Israel and Arab countries, particularly Gulf states?

With respect to the Abraham Accords, I am not aware of any concrete indications of a link, although some circumstantial evidence suggests its plausibility. On the Israeli side, the Accords seem to have given Israel greater confidence that they could make life even more miserable for the Palestinian people without having to fear adverse repercussions from their Arab neighbors. Without Trump in the White House, the right wing in Israel seemed to believe that their expansionist goals, including annexationist hopes for most of the West Bank, would have to be achieved unilaterally without diplomatic cover from the United States, and that meant intensifying their already bellicose reputation.

On the Palestinian side, opposite forces seemed at play. A sense that Netanyahu and the settlers were exerting increasing pressure to make the Palestinians believe that their struggle was futile, a lost cause, with the goal of making them agree to whatever “peace arrangement” was put forward by Israel (what I call [“the Daniel Pipes” scenario](#), squeezing the Palestinians so hard that they give up). More assertively interpreted, the rockets expressed a resolve not to be ethnically cleansed from their homes nor silenced and intimidated by the settlers nor by those who would interfere with their religious practices. It may have also been intended as a warning to the Palestinian Authority not to accept some arrangement that validated this coercive Israeli approach to “peace.” These direct encounters originating in Jerusalem were dealt with harshly by the Israeli government, prompting Hamas to act in solidarity, which meant sending rockets, the only weapon in their arsenal capable of sending a message to Israel....

Also at play undoubtedly was the challenge posed by the Accords to Palestinian steadfastness or *sumud* — a Palestinian show of resistance, even with the full awareness that the rockets would bring a massive Israel Defense Forces (IDF) military operation as in the past, and with it, death, displacement and destruction in Gaza. It was the Palestinian way of saying that our struggle goes on regardless of the costs, and even in the face of this symbolic abandonment by our Arab brothers and sisters, or at least their regimes, which in any event had long been more a matter of words than deeds. This abandonment had been previously expressed substantively by these Arab governments, especially the Gulf monarchies, which were never comfortable with Palestinian or Islamic movements from below in their region, especially in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution when political Islam showed its willingness and ability to challenge the control of the established order (as confirmed by their counter-revolutionary support for the Sisi coup in 2013 against Muslim Brotherhood leadership in Egypt).

As far as the motivations behind Arab elite willingness to ignore the pro-Palestinian sentiments of their own populations and become parties to the Abraham Accords, three factors are explanatory: First, the governments involved were given transactional rewards by the Trump diplomatic offensive in the form of weapons, economic inducements, delisting as a terrorist government and support for political claims; secondly, applying especially to the Gulf monarchies, seeking a common front with Israel in opposing and destabilizing Iran, not only in relation to its nuclear program but with respect to its political solidarity relationships in the region, which included Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis in Yemen; and thirdly, by seeming to take political risks at home to support U.S. pro-Israeli objectives in the region so as to gain leverage in Washington as a dependable ally.

Israeli police have arrested thousands of people over the last couple of weeks in Israeli Arab communities as part of a “law and order” operation. What is Israel really hoping to achieve with such actions against Palestinian protesters who, incidentally, happen to be Israeli citizens?

Jewish supremacy is the core of the Zionist project as it has played out in Israel, which has in turn generated racial policies and practices that are increasingly perceived as a form of apartheid. The government must convince the “dominant race” that it can maintain the racial hierarchy. This means that any show of resistance by the subjugated race must be disproportionately punished, with the

hope of deterring future defiance by the downtrodden.

In the past 20 years, Gaza and its people had borne the brunt of this Israeli need to exhibit its political resolve and ability to crush any challenge, however indirect, to the policies and practices of apartheid. This was the first time that communal violence in towns where Palestinians and Jews cohabited arose within Israel at a time coinciding with an IDF military operation in Gaza. It was a new *internal* threat to the apartheid regime, but posed a different kind of challenge as Israel didn't want to devastate towns within Israel, calling for an appropriate challenge.

The mass arrests of Palestinian protesters were the method relied upon to reestablish the appearance of stable control of the asymmetric relations between Jews and Palestinians.

Palestinians have been facing a severe leadership crisis for many years now, but solidarity with the Palestinian people has shifted massively on a global scale. Are there hopeful prospects for Palestinian unity? And is the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement an effective way to challenge Israeli oppression without hurting the victims themselves?

As indicated earlier, deficiencies of Palestinian leadership have weakened the Palestinian movement for self-determination. In part, this reflects Israel's overall approach ... as it has pursued for many years "a politics of fragmentation," including at the leadership level. Such fragmentation includes its occupation administration on the West Bank with more than 700 checkpoints, making internal travel incredibly difficult for Palestinians, as well as administering the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem in different ways that make Palestinian interaction difficult and unity hard to maintain. Of course, there's the toxic split between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority. As well, Israeli denial to Palestinians of any right of return has kept the refugee status of millions of Palestinians static, untenable and precarious. Refugee demands for return create tensions with Palestinians living under occupation, many of whom believe the formula "land for peace" is the best deal that they can hope for. Further, they realize that Israel might agree to end the occupation but it would never assent to upholding the repatriation rights of the refugees, which is seen as a deal-breaker. Only a strong leader with support from all of these constituencies could provide the Palestinian people with authentic leadership capable of representing both Palestinians living under occupation and in refugee camps. Israel remains determined at this point not to let this happen, and feels strong and secure

enough to refuse meaningful Palestinian statehood as well as to deny refugee rights.

The Palestinians have discredited themselves to some extent by not putting aside their differences so as to establish a common front to achieve their primary goal of self-determination. The top echelons of the Palestinian Authority live a comfortable life, rumors of corruption abound, and one senses a willingness to lie low until they can make some sort of deal that hides their political defeat.

Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian leader who is internationally recognized as representing the Palestinian people, has not held promised elections since 2005, and recently canceled elections scheduled for this year on the alleged grounds that Palestinian residents in East Jerusalem would not be allowed to vote. Critics insist that elections were canceled because Hamas was seen as the sure winner.

Hamas, although mischaracterized in the U.S. and Israel, has governed harshly in Gaza, making many Palestinians fear its leadership. Yet as [Sandy Tolan](#) and other researchers have made clear, Hamas was induced by Washington to pursue its goals by political means and compete electorally, but it was not supposed to win as it did in Gaza in 2006. When it won, it made diplomatic overtures to Washington and Tel Aviv, offering a long-term ceasefire, up to 50 years, in exchange for Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 “green line” borders, but these were rebuffed, and Hamas was returned to its “terrorist” box, and the people of Gaza were blamed for their victory in the elections.

The Palestinians have never set forth their own [collective] vision of peace, probably because it would reveal sharp differences between those willing to settle for some version of partition and those who seek a unified Palestine with a secular constitution assuring equality of rights. As matters now stand, a sustainable peace presupposes the prior dismantling of apartheid structures and the renunciation of Zionist foundational claims of Jewish supremacy. Without such steps, any agreed outcome would end up as a “ceasefire.” It is instructive to study the fall of apartheid in South Africa, and its aftermath, that failed to fulfill all of the hopes of South Africans or result in economic and social retaliation that the whites feared. Both races benefited from the transition. A bloody armed struggle was averted and so was a vindictive sequel to apartheid.

The South African narrative is also important for illustrating its “impossible” unfolding: internal resistance, strongly reinforced by a global civil society anti-

apartheid campaign supported by the UN and highlighted by BDS pressures, releasing Nelson Mandela from 27 years confinement in prison despite his life sentence so that he could negotiate the transition to constitutional multi-racial democracy and become the natural choice of the population to be the first president of the new South Africa. It all sounds plausible 25 years after the fact, but before these dramatic events, it seemed “impossible,” a dream too good to come true....

A final observation. The South African apartheid leadership did not awake one morning and become aware that their regime was immoral and illegal. It decided through backroom debate and reflection that it was better off taking the risks of constitutional democracy than go on living as a pariah state waiting for the day when the roof would collapse. In other words, the white leadership made a rational public policy decision, the contemplation of which was kept as a closely guarded state secret until a consensus reached, and the extraordinary events started happening to the great surprise of the world.

One final question. What are your thoughts on Israel's new government? What can one expect from it in general, and will it be able to skirt the Palestinian issue?

The coalition that has managed to prevail, and for the moment, the political impasse in Israel by taking over the Israeli government is not united on policy or belief. Its only unifying principle is a deep hostility to Netanyahu's personality and character. For that reason, the diversity of its composition makes it fragile with respect to sharp departures from Likud consensus on Palestine that has prevailed for the last twelve years in Israel.

At the same time, the dominant elements in the Bennett-Lapid coalition are correctly perceived on Palestinian issues as further to the right on such issues as accelerated ethnic cleansing of East Jerusalem, expansion of West Bank settlements, annexation of all or most of the West Bank, opposition to any genuine form of Palestinian statehood, and greater severity with respect to the implementation of apartheid policies and practices. Further, it is expected that Naftali Bennett, an exponent of the extreme right-wing settler movement and maximal Zionist goals, will be Israel's prime minister for the next two years during which he will undoubtedly be tempted to push Israeli policy even further to the right.

It is, of course, possible that Bennett will contain his anti-Palestinian fury so as to hold the coalition together, but it is just as likely that he will be prepared to pay the price of a collapsed coalition by being able to attract support for his program from the Likud members and other rightists outside the coalition who agree with his approach on Palestine and are no longer tied to Netanyahu or preoccupied with having a place in the leadership of the government. It is also possible that Bennett will move more cautiously to avoid weakening American support, which is already weaker than it has been in this century. Bennett is less abrasive in personal style than Netanyahu, which is hardly a notable achievement, but is more of an extreme ideologue and less of an opportunist.

Given this further turn to the right in Israel there is no realistic prospect of any kind of meaningful diplomacy for the foreseeable future. There are, in contrast, real possibilities of stronger global solidarity efforts through the UN and by way of civil society campaign such as BDS, and a stronger public support for Palestinian grievances.

This interview has been lightly edited for clarity and length.

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